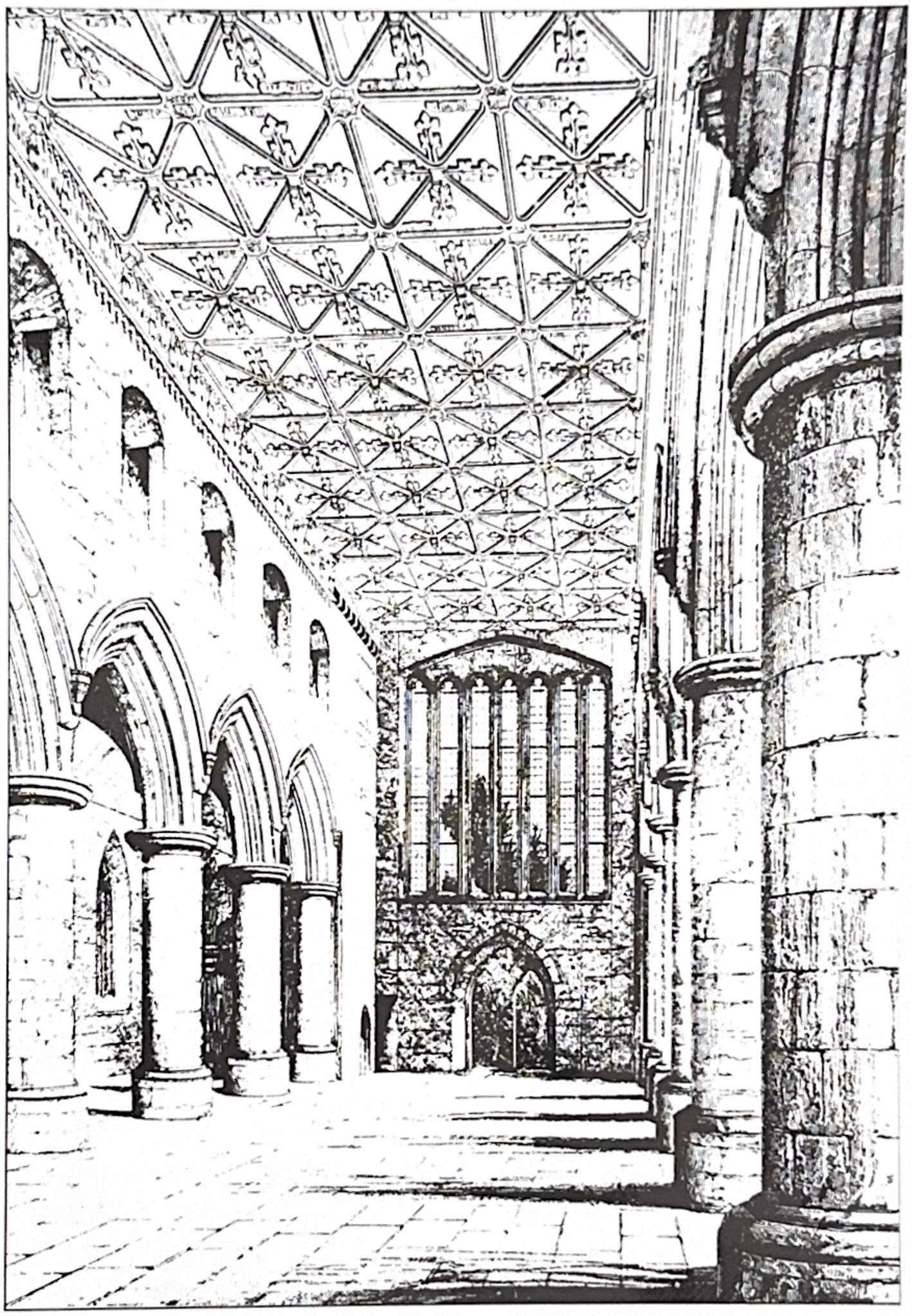
ST MACHAR'S CATHEDRAL

THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST MACHAR

Old Aberdeen



The Cathedral is Church of Scotland; the appellation Cathedral is historic rather than descriptive, the Church of Scotland being presbyterian rather than episcopal in government. The Church of Scotland is part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

Cathedral worship on Sundays
is at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Holy Communion is celebrated on Christmas Day, Easter Day, Pentecost, on the last Sunday of every month and at other times. On all occasions visitors who are members of any branch of Christ's Church are invited to partake. Any unprepared in heart and mind should simply pass the elements to their neighbour.

The text of this Guide Book has been prepared by the Minister of the Cathedral, The Rev. Dr Stewart Todd.

The Nave looking west.

A TOUR OF THE CATHEDRAL

Welcome! You have entered by the south porch. You have purchased this Guide Book from a position in the south aisle. If now you will walk to the west end of the Cathedral you will be able to look east and form an impression of the whole building internally. What you see is the mainly 15th century nave of the Cathedral. The transepts are in ruin: the central tower has gone: the choir has disappeared. The central tower fell in a storm in 1688, and since that time the Cathedral has been screened off by successive attempts at filling the west arch of the original crossing. The latest attempt, in 1953, incorporates splendid stained glass by William Wilson.

THE SOUTH AISLE

If now you will return through the arcade to the south aisle you will find interest in the westmost window, one of three in this aisle containing glass by the distinguished Scottish artist, Dr Douglas Strachan. In the first window there is depicted the story of St Machar and his mission from Iona. The principal source of the material we have on these Celtic origins is a 14th century poem which can be assumed to use considerable poetic licence. According to this, however, St Machar was a friend and disciple of St Columba. It would appear that Machar was possessed of exceptional gifts, a fact which caused jealousy among his companions on Iona. Columba therefore sent his friend off on a mission to the mainland with instructions to journey until he reached a spot where a river, as it approached the sea, described the curve of a bishop's crozier. The river Don obliged. Whether this is history or an aetiological myth we cannot tell. That 'Aberdon', later called 'Old Aberdeen', was an old Celtic centre seems to be generally accepted. The mediaeval tradition was of a 'costlyk kyrk', but it is more likely that this part of the legend is a figment of the poet's imagination (an attempt perhaps to provide ancient precedent for the costly Cathedral which was certainly planned and was perhaps already started upon when our 14th century source was written). *Circa* A.D. 580 is a conjectural date for the foundation of St Machar's 'costlyk kyrk'.

Not until 1131 does documentary evidence for the history of the building become available. A document dated April of that year mentions a bishop, Nechtan, by name. In 1157 Nechtan's successor Edward received authority from Pope Adrian IV to institute monks or canons in his Cathedral. It is assumed that a Cathedral building will have been erected by 1157 and that it will have been in the round-arched, 'romanesque' or 'Norman' style, and there is confirmation of this in an 'abacus' or square cap of a small romanesque pillar found incorporated in the stonework of the present Cathedral and now to be seen in the Charter Room. The style of the surviving abacus is consistent with the date and very similar to details at Dunfermline Abbey completed in 1150.

Next to the westmost or Crombie window is another by Strachan, the War Memorial window, depicting St Michael and the dragon, the triumph of the powers of light over the powers of darkness. The memorial tablet below is of Italian marble and contains the names of 134 men who gave their lives in the First World War. These men all belonged to the Cathedral and to Old Aberdeen United Free Church. The memorial of the war of 1939-45 adjoins the earlier memorial.

The double doors through which you entered the Cathedral give access to the Charter Room. Restoration of the space above the south porch to serve as a Charter Room and a place of safe-keeping of other Cathedral records was made possible by a generous benefaction by the McRobert Trust in 1968. The McRobert coat of arms appears above the double doors (see also page 11).

Permission to view the Charter Room and its contents must be sought from Cathedral staff. There is a small charge for entry. Bona fide students requiring access to records should apply to the Archivist, University of Aberdeen, who will arrange for study facilities at King's College.

Continuing eastwards in the south aisle your eye will be drawn to the delicate blue and

The Nave looking east.

soft yellows of the Bishops window of 1913, the third of the Strachan windows. This is a bold and engaging composition and a useful visual aid for the subsequent history of the building in the mediaeval period. Boece, the first Principal of the University of Aberdeen, tells us that during the years 1282-1328, the years of the episcopate of Henry de Chene or Henry Cheyne, the romanesque Cathedral mentioned above was demolished and a new one begun. It seems improbable that a bishop would leave himself entirely without a building and therefore more likely that the demolition affected only the eastern part of the building and that the short choir and apse of the romanesque Cathedral was replaced by a structure spacious enough to accommodate a developing 'chapter'. By the end of the fifteenth century the Aberdeen 'chapter' had 29 canons, a number exceeded only at Glasgow (32) and St. Andrews (36).

It was during the years 1355-1380, the period of the episcopate of Bishop Alexander Kininmund II (pictured in the left-hand light of the Bishops window) that the rebuilding of the Norman Cathedral, planned by Cheyne, really got underway. Again Boece speaks of demolishing the ancient church. On this occasion he must refer to the nave. Kininmund had inherited a Norman nave and an Early English choir, begun by Cheyne, and not long finished. How far Kininmund took the work before his death in 1380 is still an historical problem. The western piers of a central tower in red sandstone, having on the capitals naturalistic carving of great beauty, which can be seen today at the east end of the present nave, are almost certainly attributable to this Kininmund. But now textual evidence recently brought to light strongly supports the contention that the transition from sandstone to granite and from a Decorated style to the restrained design dictated by the granite came already in Kininmund's time. This theory attributes the building of the western towers to this 14th century period.

Certainly the granite nave and marvellously impressive west front were completed between 1422 and 1440, the period of the episcopate of Henry Lichton (right-hand light). The whole Cathedral was completed by Bishop Elphinstone (1483-1514) with the addition to the central tower of a belfry and spire and a new choir at the east end.

The three windows at the east end of the south aisle and the two small windows behind the organ, the work of Cottier, date from the 1860s and are examples of the renewed interest in stained glass that came with the romanticism of the Gothic Revival. The window depicting Faith, Hope and Charity commemorates three Aberdeen artists of whom perhaps the best known is William Dyce (1806-1864).

Dyce was essentially a religious painter though he is now better known for his landscapes. He was the first Professor of the Theory of Fine Art in this country, giving his inaugural lecture, on Christian Art, at King's College, London in 1844. Works of his can be seen in Aberdeen Art Gallery, at the Tate Gallery, London and in the Queen's Robing Room in the House of Lords.

Before leaving the south aisle you will perhaps take note of the memorial tablets in the Mitchell Chapel and in particular the charming and unusual small memorial to Simon Dods (one of Bishop Elpinstone's most loyal administrators) who is mentioned in Public Instruments (items 24 and 25) in the Charter Room. He seems to have been Rector of Invernochty and Canon of Aberdeen from before June 1483 until July 1496. The long Epitaph tells the tale of his numerous benefactions. Mention is made of his gratitude to the memory of his patron John, Earl of Mar and Garioch and to the Queen, Margaret of Denmark, wife of King James III.

The Pulpit, the East Window and the Heraldic Ceiling will now engage your attention.

On Pulpits

The main elements of Christian worship are the preaching and hearing of the word of God and the celebration of the sacrament of holy communion. These were established from the beginning as the main elements, in simple obedience to our Lord's two clear directives: 'Go and teach all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you' *and* 'Do this in remembrance of me'.

The physical arrangements that were made in the earliest places of Christian worship would appear to have been as follows. The person presiding at worship sat behind an

The pulpit and Bishop's window.

elevated table and both preached and celebrated from behind the table. He appears to have sat to preach! Scriptures were read from an elevated platform originally pushed into the middle, nearer the people. In time, around the fourth century, as larger churches were built, the complaint was heard that preaching from a distant table was too big a strain on the preacher's voice and so he came forward to preach from the platform from which the Scriptures were read. That is the origin of the pulpit.

As the centuries passed the emphasis in worship began to fall more and more upon one part of the original two-part worship (word and sacrament) and it fell on sacrament. Medieval cathedrals therefore are notable not only for their cruciform shape and east west axis but much more for drawing the eye to the altar or table, usually given a splendid setting at the east end. The pulpit has no real architectural setting: it is a sort of incidental extra attached to a pillar.

The Reformation sought to recover the balance of word and sacrament but again as time went on things got out of hand. In the pre-Reformation Church too great an emphasis was placed on the sacrament to the detriment of the reading and preaching of the word of God; in the post-Reformation Church too great an emphasis was placed on the word to the detriment of the sacrament. And so you find many churches in Scotland where clearly the pulpit is the focal point, where indeed it has a splendid architectural setting and where the table is quite inconspicuous and in a few cases non-existent, brought in when required.

The pulpit in this Cathedral, while not so grand or so ornate as to interrupt the architectural line of the arcade, nevertheless indicates that we do honour the word of God. The word is read and preached from the pulpit. This pulpit was enhanced in 1987 by the addition of a tester.

THE EAST WINDOW

The central subject of the window is the crucified Christ. At the base is the promise of redemption in the Nativity with shepherds and magi. Above that across three lights is the table of the Last Supper. At the top of the window, above the rainbow symbol of promise, sits Christ in glory with the seven candlesticks above and around. In his presence on either side stand the Scottish Saints, St Machar, St Columba, St Ninian, St Mungo, St Cuthbert, St Margaret, with the patron apostle St Andrew.

This beautiful window dating from 1953 is by William Wilson.

THE HERALDIC CEILING

The decoration of medieval cathedrals and churches was encouraged on both aesthetic and educational grounds. The faithful were instructed by scenes from the Scriptures or from the legends of the saints. No doubt they also received some broader education from carved bestiaries, astronomical clocks and from the royal statues and tombs of great men which filled some churches. In 1520 Bishop Gavin Dunbar enhanced St Machar's with a flat ceiling of panelled oak with the 48 shields resplendent with the heraldries of the Pope, the Emperor, St Margaret, the kings and princes of Christendom, the bishops and earls of Scotland: aesthetically very fine and, in terms of the instruction of the faithful, one of the most ambitious of all medieval visual aids – a sermon in fact on Scotland and Europe and the Church of Jesus Christ in these lands and in all the world. One guesses his text was surely from Psalm 47:9:
'The shields of the earth belong unto God'.

There are 48 shields arranged in three rows of 16 each, running from east to west. In the centre of the scheme is the Church, represented by the coats of arms of the Pope, the archbishops and bishops of Scotland, and at the west end the arms of the prior of St Andrews representing the monasteries and other religious houses of Scotland and the arms of King's College representing the centres of scholarship.

The series of shields running parallel to the ecclesiastical series and on its north side displays the arms of the Holy Roman Emperor and the kings of Christendom. The emperor at the time was Charles V, twenty years of age, monarch of Spain, Aragon and Sicily. The

order in which the other monarchs are arranged illustrates their relationship with Scotland. Thus the *fleurs de lys* of France come next to the Emperor. England, the arms are those of Henry VIII, comes fourth. Then come the lesser kingdoms and dukedoms in broadly hierarchical arrangement, concluding tidily with the town council of Old Aberdeen, its coat of arms a pot of lilies.

The third series, on the south side of the nave, represents the political scene within Scotland. The series begins with the arms of King James V. It then displays the arms of the great families of Scotland and ends with those of the town of New Aberdeen, representing the burghs of Scotland.

In the conceiving of the scheme of the heraldic ceiling there was no doubt an awareness of the growing national consciousness in Scotland at the time. It is a wholly proper thing for a nation to have a sense of identity. There are very good biblical precedents for it! Perhaps St Machar's was endeavouring to provide an emotional and devotional basis on which this nationalism could rest. The message of the ceiling is clear and bold. These St Machar's men believed in a united church; like all good Europeans they dreamed of a Holy Empire; they believed also in a Scotland with its own sovereign identity and history but having at the same time, as part of its true character, its place in the Christian brotherhood of European nations, their national and local loyalties firmly thirled to Holy Church. These are the things the St Machar's men in 1520 thought fit to immortalise, and that only a year or two before the march of history was to make of it a mockery.

The nineteenth century, which produced the fragmentation of the Church of Scotland, produced also this verdict on the ceiling of St Machar's: 'a gaudy piece of decor wholly unsuited to a Church'! Today we are capable of a more sensitive evaluation. Indeed here we are four and half centuries later hirpling back to a belief in the propriety and validity and honest Christian need for Church unity; here we are four and a half centuries later, whether or not the Common Market is a good thing economically, beginning to think of ourselves again as Europeans. Either Bishop Dunbar and the St Machar's men were blind fools to spend all that money on the ceiling in 1520 or else they were men of great courage, idealists perhaps but not afraid to articulate their ideals, even with the echoes in their ears of Martin Luther's hammer on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg and the creaks of the joints of the Holy Roman Empire and the lament for the fallen at Flodden. They were idealists perhaps, but as an American politician of a later day once said: 'Ideals are like stars: you will not succeed in touching them with your hands. But like the seafaring men on the desert of waters, you choose them as your guides, and following them you will reach your destiny'.

THE NORTH AISLE

Moving now into the north aisle you will pass the organ, a three manual and pedal organ by Henry Willis, installed in 1891. The organ has 40 speaking stops controlling 2,170 pipes. The splendour of its great chorus work and the magnificence of its reeds have become widely known and organ recitals are given from time to time.

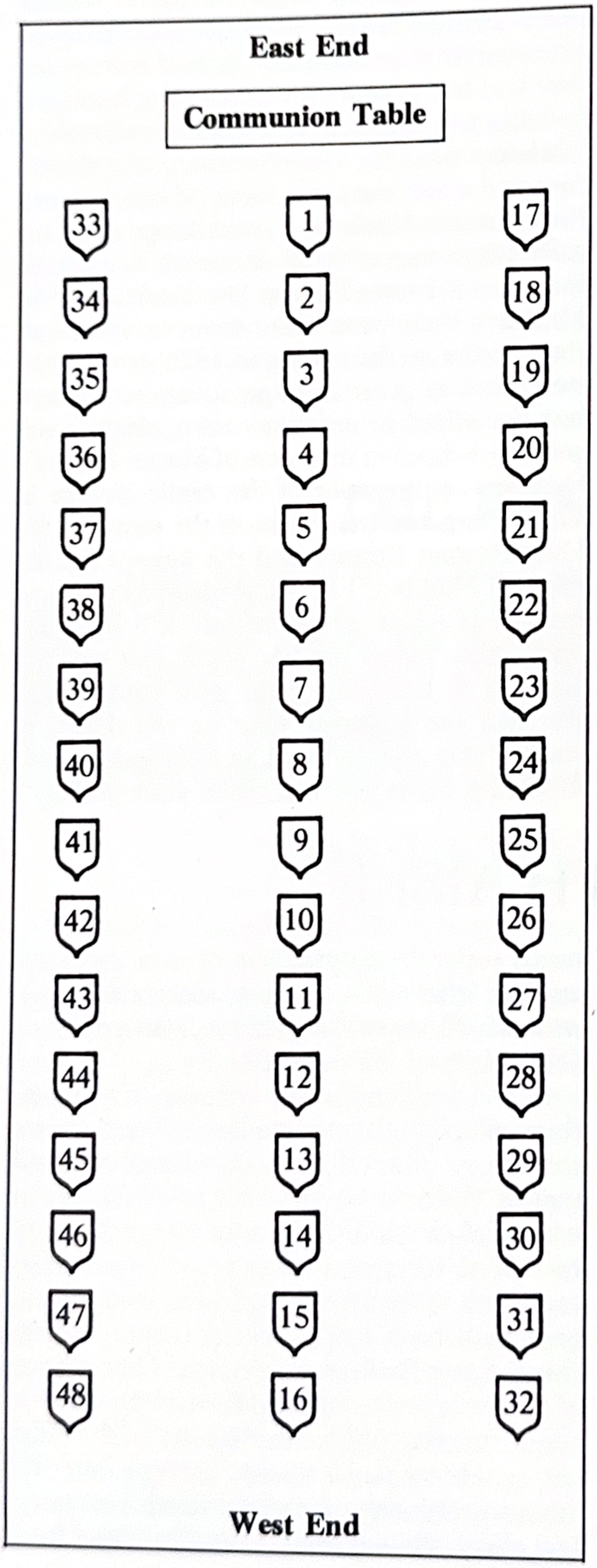
A handsome linen chest, the gift of the Woman's Guild in 1970, sits in the north aisle.

Of Aberdeenshire granite and sculpted by Hew Lorimer, the font dates from 1953. On it St Machar is depicted baptizing converts in the River Don. On the rim are carved the words from the 47th Paraphrase: 'When to the sacred font we came', intermingled with waves and fish.

An aumbry and a piscina are seen on the north wall: the former has been a cupboard and the latter was a basin to receive the water with which vessels would be cleansed after a celebration of the eucharist.

At the west end of the aisle are to be found three effigies of historical interest and artistic excellence. The effigy in the arched recess is that of Walter Idill, the Official of Aberdeen, who died in 1468 in the Chanonry, where he had lived for twenty two years. This effigy, carved in sandstone from Morayshire, would once have been richly coloured. Even without this the late Dr Francis Eeles reckoned it one of the most beautiful of its kind in the whole of Great Britain. Interest in this and in the effigy of an unknown canon centres on the conjunction of a priest's eucharistic vestments and above them a peculiar kind of close hood

Key to Armorial Shields
St Machar's Cathedral Ceiling



Centre Row

1 Pope Leo X (Giovanni de'Medici)
2 The Archbishop of St Andrews (Andrew Forman)
3 The Archbishop of Glasgow (James Beaton)
4 The Bishop of Dunkeld (Gavin Douglas)
5 The Bishop of Aberdeen (Gavin Dunbar)
6 The Bishop of Moray (James Hepburn)
7 The Bishop of Ross (Robert Cockburn)
8 The Bishop of Brechin (John Hepburn)
9 The Bishop of Caithness (Andrew Stewart)
10 The Bishop of Galloway (David Arnot)
11 The Bishop of Dunblane (James Chisholm)
12 The Bishop of Argyll (David Hamilton)
13 The Bishop of Orkney (Edward Stewart)
14 The Bishop of the Isles (John Campbell)
15 The Prior of St Andrews (John Hepburn)
16 The University of Aberdeen

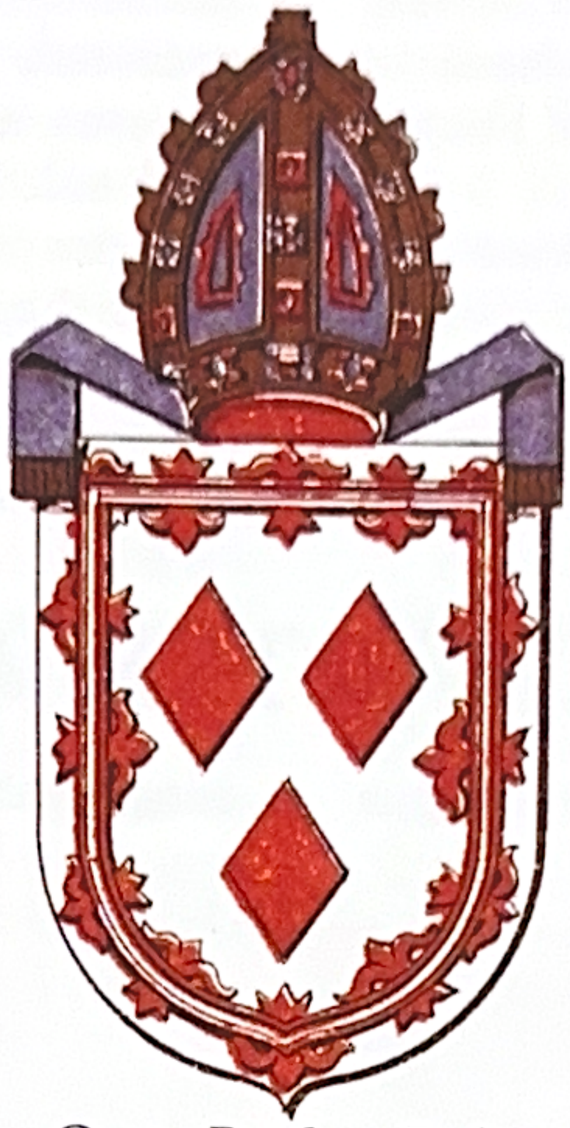
Right-hand (South) Row

17 The King of Scotland (James V)
18 St Margaret of Scotland
19 The Duke of Albany (John Stewart)
20 The Earl of March (John Stewart)
21 The Earl of Moray (James Stewart)
22 The Earl of Douglas (no holder in 1520)
23 The Earl of Angus (Archibald Douglas)
24 The Earl of Mar (no holder in 1520)
25 The Earl of Sutherland (Adam Gordon)
26 The Earl of Crawford (David Lindsay)
27 The Earl of Huntly (Alexander Gordon)
28 The Earl of Argyll (Colin Campbell)
29 The Earl of Errol (William Hay)
30 The Earl Marischal (William Keith)
31 The Earl of Bothwell (Patrick Hepburn)
32 The Royal Burgh of Aberdeen

Left-hand (North) Row

33 The Holy Roman Emperor (Charles V)
34 The King of France (Francis I)
35 The King of Spain (Charles V)
36 The King of England (Henry VIII)
37 The King of Denmark (Christian II)
38 The King of Hungary (Louis II)
39 The King of Portugal (Emmanuel the Fortunate)
40 The King of Aragon (Charles V)
41 The King of Cyprus (vacant)
42 The King of Navarre (Charles V)
43 The King of Sicily (Charles V)
44 The King of Poland (Sigismund I)
45 The King of Bohemia (Louis II)
46 The Duke of Bourbon (Charles of Bourbon)
47 The Duke of Gueldres (Charles of Egmond)
48 The Burgh of Old Aberdeen

The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V.



Gavin Dunbar, Bishop of Aberdeen.

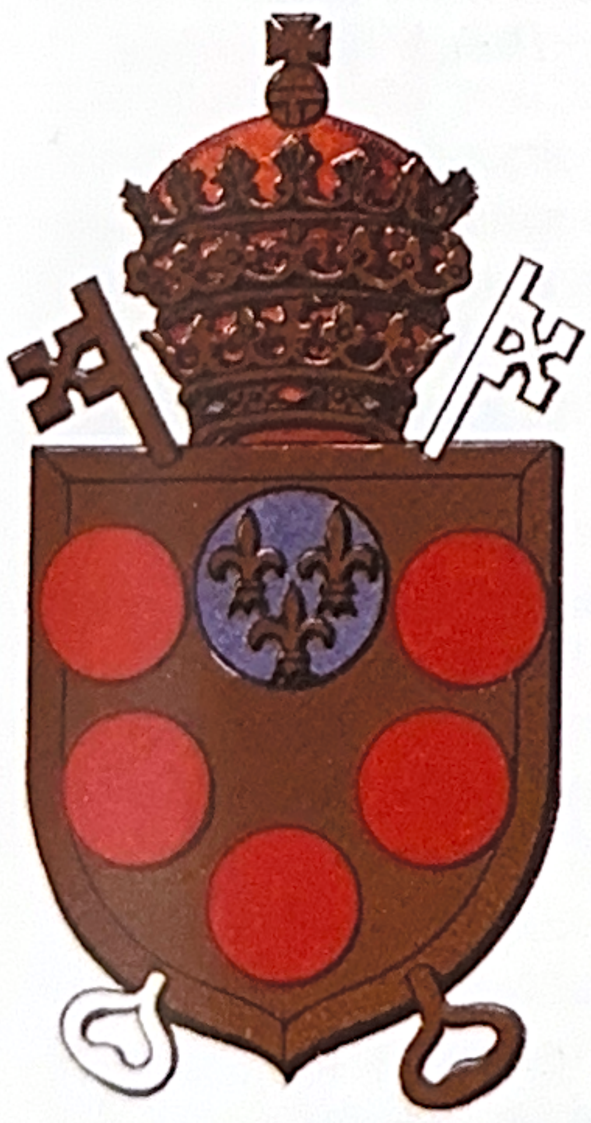
King Henry VIII.

The Burgh of Old Aberdeen.

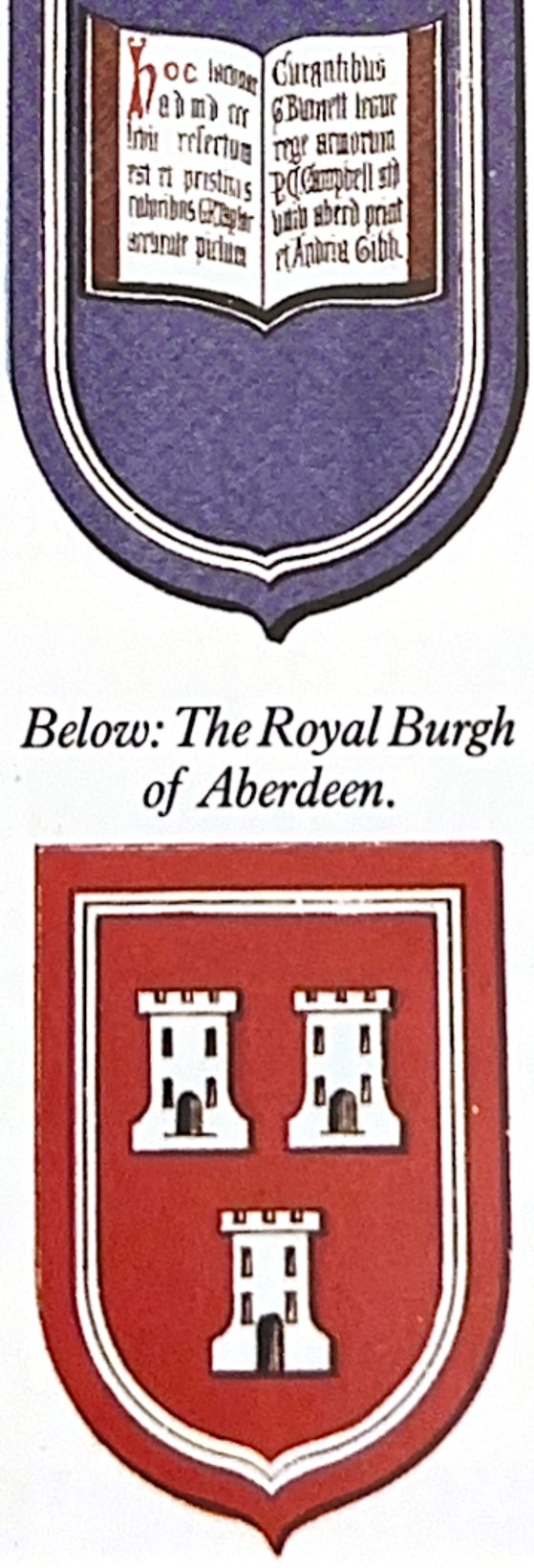
University of Aberdeen.

Below: The Royal Burgh of Aberdeen.

William Keith, Earl Marischal.



Left: Giovanni de Medici, Pope Leo X.



Right: James V of Scotland.

and tippet called an almuce, worn to protect the head and shoulders in what was no doubt a bitterly cold and draughty church. This was not English cathedral practice and is one further indication of the independence of Aberdeen or perhaps of its links with France. The third effigy is of Bishop Lichton.

You might like to explore the area at the west behind the screen and climb the stairs to the gallery. Thereafter you may want to visit the Charter Room. Before you return to the Chanonry you must not fail to admire the exterior West Front. Sir Gilbert Scott's judgement of a century ago is still worth quoting. He wrote: 'The character of the work is suited to the stubborn material in which it is executed, being bold and simple in the extreme, and contemptuous of all refinement of detail. It is, however, extremely effective; and the western towers, with the façade to which they belong, are admirable specimens of simple but telling composition: indeed, I know few towers of such moderate height which are so effective'.

THE CHARTER ROOM

St Machar's is fortunate in possessing a considerable collection of medieval charters of

Page from Bishop Dunbar's Epistolare in the Charter Room. This displays the arms of Gavin Dunbar, Bishop of Aberdeen.

which a selection is in the Charter Room. The earliest one on display is dated 1383. Most of the charters record gifts for the maintenance of the chaplains or vicars choral of the Cathedral, in return for which the benefactors requested prayers or anniversary masses. To judge from the charters that are extant there would seem to have been a marked increase in generosity around the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century, the period of the episcopates of Elphinstone and Dunbar. Of course this could be explained as the accidental survival of these particular charters and the disappearance of others, but one likes to think that it is not accident but a genuine response to the strenuous efforts these bishops made to enchance the fabric, the music and the liturgy of St Machar's, efforts which undoubtedly put it musically and liturgically in a leading position among Scottish cathedrals.

Among various other items of interest to be seen in the Charter Room is *Ane Regester for the Diseipline.* 'The Notes, therefore, of the true Kirk of God', wrote the authors of the Scots Confession of 1560, 'we believe, confess, and avow to be, first, the true preaching of the Word of God; . . . secondly the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus . . . ; lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's Word prescribes'. They were absolutely right. The Christian life ought certainly to be disciplined. The manner in which Kirk Session discipline was administered in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Scotland was often, alas, unedifying and one is grateful that in St Machar's the registering of cases of discipline comes to a merciful end in 1906, and the entries for a few years before that are discreetly sealed from view.

A facscimile edition of *Bishop Dunbar's Epistolare* is in the Charter Room, the original being in the possession of Aberdeen University. This handsome folio of 169 numbered leaves of parchment was made for Bishop Gavin Dunbar in Antwerp in 1527. It is one of six medieval service-books from St Machar's that have survived. No other Scottish Cathedrals have any such books extant, not even fragments. The book was intended for use by the subdeacon and is a lectionary containing lessons of the Old and New Testament, for the whole year, from Advent to Advent. A similar book, with silver-plated covers, would have lain on the altar for the deacon who sang the Gospel.

WORSHIP IN THE CATHEDRAL

If you have come here as a visitor it is more than likely that you have come at a time other than the hours of worship and therefore you have a less than complete impression of the place. For this is the house of the people of God and you have not really seen the Cathedral until you have seen it in use for worship, with people in pews and with the undoubted eloquence of the building complemented by the words and music of liturgy. As the first page of this guide book indicates visitors are warmly invited to be present at all parts of our worship.

Visitors from outwith Scotland may be less than enthusiastic about coming to worship, since Scotland has had in the past a reputation for plainness, even dreariness in worship, lack of interest in prayer-forms and music, complete disregard for liturgical tradition. Today this is no longer true and certainly here in St Machar's worship is richly liturgical and musical. The vestments of the clergy may not begin to compete with those of Anglican or Roman Catholics or Orthodox; we still cling for the most part to sombre black Genevan gowns, but these are usually relieved by a colourful academic hood and there is increasing daring in the decoration of scarves. In the Cathedral a mixed choir wear purple robes and lighting highlights liturgical colours on pulpit and holy table.

The Church of Scotland does not put a Prayer Book in the hands of the people. It does have, mainly for clergy, what is called 'The Book of Common Order'. The Church of Scotland avoids definitive forms and provides models for services. It does so because it recognises, as now the world Church recognises, that the search for prayer-language and for forms that are appropriate at once to worshippers and to Christ, the Lord of the Church in the worshippers' midst, must go on tirelessly and without remission.

The Order for Morning Service in the Cathedral follows the models in the Book of Common Order, and incidentally the older

The font.

Scottish tradition, in moving through reading and preaching and intercession to a climax in thanksgiving. Although we do not celebrate the Eucharist or Holy Communion every Sunday, as many Christians do, we share with them the fullness of eucharistic devotion in prayer and dedication, in everything except the partaking of bread and wine. As will be deduced from the information at the beginning, we here do in fact celebrate the Eucharist on one Sunday in three on average.

Traditional prayer-language is used in worship in St Machar's though of course this is complemented by modern speech in the 'biddings' to prayer. In the main the Authorised Version of the Bible is read in public worship. Traditional speech is preferred not because it is hallowed by centuries-long usage but because it has a contribution to make to the worship and mission of the Church and because it is an art-form of rare quality and part of our culture.

Except in the summer months, the morning worship is enriched by choral music. Usually two anthems are sung, one in association with the readings from Scripture and one leading on to the climax of the worship in eucharistic-style prayers spoken from the holy table. The choir has a very large repertoire, classical and modern, and for several decades now has ranked with the best in the land. Hymns are an integral part of worship, the people's part indeed, and care is taken to context them. In other words they are chosen to fit the position they occupy in the progression of the service. On occasion, and for some parts of the service, they are chosen thematically. Psalms are sung in the metrical version and also in the prose version, the latter to Anglican chant. Canticles are sung, creeds are recited, responses are used frequently as are general acts of penitence and thanksgiving.

In the Eucharist or Holy Communion the elements of bread and wine are brought to the table in solemn procession reminiscent of the Great Entrance in the Orthodox tradition. After prayer they are taken to the people in the pews by the elders and passed from hand to hand.

Since 1987 worshippers have been summoned by a peal of eight bells, the gift of a generous benefactress. They are housed in the south west tower. There are only fourteen such peals rung in Scotland. The church's bells are a signal to the faithful and to the world. They are a signal to the faithful that it is time to come to Church, time to make a clearing in the daily round and worship God. Their happy sound also indicates that God is greatly to be praised, the good news of the Christian faith is gratefully to be heard and the sacrifice of praise is joyfully to be made. The times may be ungodly but the Church does not for that reason silence its bells. The Church is in business, beginning with worship. Our towers tell forth salvation.

THE DANZIG CHALICE

In the Church of Scotland Holy Communion is celebrated with greater or lesser frequency depending on the local Church. While some like St Machar's celebrate on average perhaps one Sunday in three throughout the year many celebrate only quarterly or even twice yearly. At their best these occasional Communions are services of profound spiritual intensity and an important and significant feature of them is the Communion proper when the bread of the Sacrament is passed from hand to hand and the wine is drunk from a common cup, or rather from a number of common cups according to the size of the congregation. St Machar's possesses sixteen of these cups or

chalices; six of them are seventeenth century. Of these six five are from the hand of an Aberdeen silversmith and are dated 1683; one is from Danzig and is to be dated about 1621. It was made by a silversmith called Christian Junge, who became a master craftsman in 1617 and a burgess of Danzig in 1618. From the engravings on it it is clear that the cup from Danzig was intended for domestic use. The figures have nothing to do with Church. It is not known how this cup came into the possession of the Cathedral, though this information may yet come to light. It is a fact however that in 1621, when in the Church of Scotland presbyterianism and episcopacy still existed alongside each other, there was a bishop in St Machar's with the name Forbes. This bishop Forbes was a brother of the laird of Craigievar and the laird of Craigievar made his wealth from trade with Danzig. Indeed he was popularly known as 'Danzig Willie'. There may be a connection.

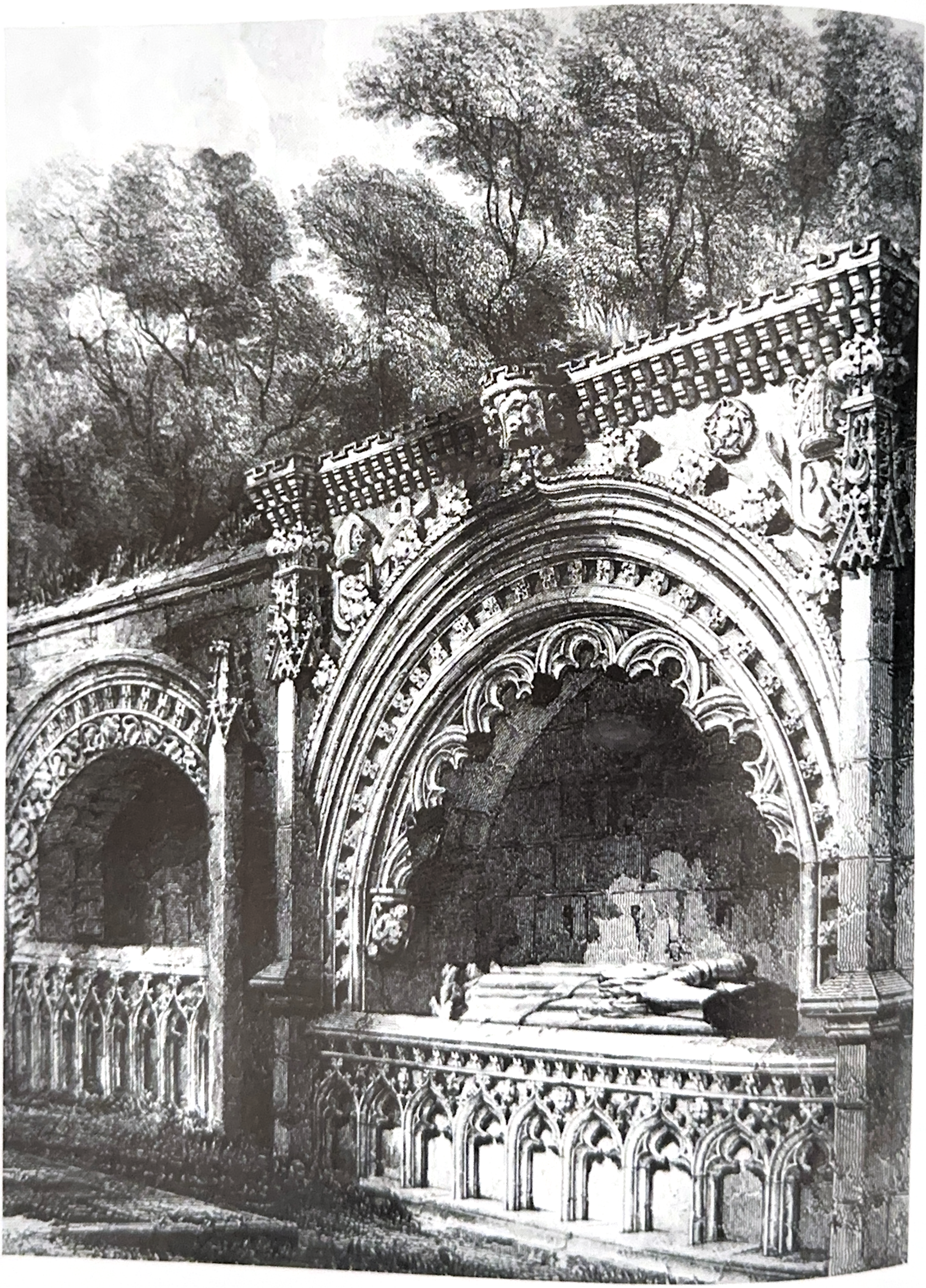
A reference to the other five chalices can be found in the minutes of the Kirk Session for the year 1683. The minute speaks of the trouble the Kirk Session had when the Communion season came along because they had to borrow cups from other parishes. It goes on to note the decision of the Kirk Session to have two goblets in their possession remade into three beakers and to commission two more beakers – five in all.

Why did the Cathedral have to borrow cups for Holy Communion? The answer is that most of its pre-Reformation silver seems to have gone. Much appears to have been deposited at the time of the Reformation with the Burgh Council who decided to sell it to the highest bidder. This was the sort of fate that befell all pre-Reformation silver in Scotland. Some of it was appropriated by people to whom it had been entrusted. And so after the Reformation all the churches and cathedrals in Scotland were dependent on gifts of new cups from landowners, heritors or persons successful in trade. It appears they were usually given in twos. These cups or chalices vary greatly in design. Some are very rich. When you ask why are the the Aberdeen ones so simple and why in particular did the Kirk Session have two goblets made into three beakers, with tongue in cheek the answer might be given 'because they were Aberdonians', but the real reason is probably rather different. The Aberdeen beakers like the Danzig beaker are simple, but they are silver. They are such as you would find in a great man's house. This beaker form seems to have been favoured in many parishes north of the Tay and especially in the north-east. And perhaps it was in deliberate reaction against the extravagant designs of the pre-Reformation period. If you want to grasp some facets of the faith afresh you want new visual aids. If you want to recover the original significance of your 'cup of salvation' when it has been overlaid with misguided piety and something akin to superstition then perhaps you do rethink your symbols. There is a time for a flourish and a time for restraint, a time for richness and intricacy of design and a time for simplicity that bows its head before a truth that art cannot express and only the heart of the believer can adore.

The Danzig Chalice, originally a secular vessel it dates from about 1621.

THE TOMB OF BISHOP DUNBAR

On the south wall of the ruined transepts there is to be found the tomb of Bishop Dunbar (1518-1532). His effigy would once have lain on it but has gone. Though somewhat defaced by the weather and mutilated by over-zealous Covenanters the tomb with its six-foot arch is still very impressive.



THE CHANONRY

The name Chanonry given to the area adjoining the Cathedral indicates that here were gathered in earlier centuries the residences of the canons of the Cathedral. The French 'chanoine', rather than the English 'canon', has been at work in shaping this local name. It occurs also in connection with the beautiful ruined Cathedral of Fortrose and the name still designates a presbytery in Easter Ross.

THE CATHEDRAL TODAY

The Cathedral Church of St Machar is as beloved today as ever it was and those who know it never weary of giving thanks to God for its simple, austere grandeur. It is a brave composition, a masterpiece as a work of art, the sort of masterpiece which some reckon true art, which does not commandeer the eye of the beholder but extends his vision to what is around in God's creation and what is inexpressibly beyond in God's eternity. St Machar's does not disdain the companionship of tall trees or the embrace of the mist that swirls in from the sea or the affusion of a soft rain or the benediction of summer sun. Likewise within there are sermons in its stones but the hard granite sets limits to upstart, man-made, time-bound sermons in stone and makes it possible for men of all ages to hear something of the word of God.

Here is an important part of our Scottish heritage.

Heritage it has to be said, has become a sort of cult in recent decades and an industry kept going by a hundred and one societies. The nation's debt to these bodies cannot be over-estimated. But there is an obverse to this coin: we have become so addicted to heritage that it would seem to have eroded our will to go on. The worship of the past, and what it has created, is reckoned by some to have been taken by our generation to an extreme unknown to any previous century. It is necessary to rescue the word 'heritage' from the distortion to which it has been subjected. The word heritage, according to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, means 'that which has been or may be inherited'. In other words, the word 'heritage' embraces not only the past but also the present.

We must not let the past swallow us up. Historic heritage must not imply contemporary fossilisation. There is no reason on earth why we should not introduce new things into historic environments if they are the right new things, and in the case of the churches it is a worshipping community which will produce these new things. Christ in the midst of his people, working through his Spirit, makes the great Christian past present: the whole salvation event and its effects are made present, and the true worshipper is permitted to share in the effects. The Lord is present and all his saints with him and we rejoice in the communion of saints. It is theological aesthetic which properly and pre-eminently make heritage in Churches. In other words, it is the most excelling beauty of Christian truth and hope and love, the quintessential beauty of the Cross at the heart of the tale, it is that beauty proclaimed and apperceived that makes the ecclesiastical past live and provides most reliably in any age that which may be inherited. St Machar's is not dead heritage; it is a live Church. Come and worship with us. Presbyterianism has no place for Cathedrals, but Presbyterianism is only a system of Church government and administration. In the wider context of worship, of word and sacrament, of experience of the Holy Spirit, of apperception of the true verities and of response to them, in that wider context the Church of Scotland is part of the Church Catholic, and in that wider context St Machar's, with or without a bishop, is a cathedral.

A Cathedral is a place for the big occasion and they occur here from time to time. It is also a place for music and drama. The acoustics of St Machar's are flattering to the singer and to the instrumentalist and much music is made here. All of it is claimed for God and 'baptized' by prayer into the worship-life of the cathedral.

Cathedrals are also once again places of pilgrimage for large numbers of people. The challenge to point the tourist, even momentarily to God, is always before us. Cathedrals

William Elphinstone, Chancellor of Scotland and pre-Reformation Bishop of Aberdeen from 1484 to 1514. He completed the Cathedral's central tower which fell in 1688. His arms, surmounting three fishes representing the Holy Trinity can be seen in the window with the River Don behind.

were also traditionally places of education and this and our other publications, especially our guide for young people, represent our endeavour to fulfil that role. We believe that, in a way unparalleled since the Middle Ages, we live in the Age of the Cathedral.

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Opposite: View from Seaton Park.
Back cover: the West Front towers.